

During the first half of this century, the lead content of paint was seen as an indicator of its quality—more lead meant better paint. As a result, by the time lead was banned from house paint in 1978, the toxic metal was present in most U.S. homes.

As old lead-based paint in homes ages and deteriorates, children, who are more susceptible to lead poisoning than adults, can easily ingest the resulting dust. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate that 4.4% of U.S. children ages one to five have too much lead in their bodies, mostly as a result of the lead-based paint in their homes.

Anyone who has recently bought or rented an older home knows, however, that steps are being taken to prevent U.S. children from being further exposed to the lead in old paint. Since 1996, the federal government has required property owners to provide an educational pamphlet on lead-based paint to new occupants of homes built before 1978, and to disclose any known lead-related hazards in the home. The requirement was included in the Residential Lead-Based Paint Poisoning Prevention Act, known as Title X, which was signed into law on 28 October 1992. The passage of Title X signaled renewed federal interest in the effects of lead on children, showing that the efforts of advocacy groups such as the Alliance to End Childhood Lead Poisoning were bearing fruit.

Since its inception in 1990, the alliance has worked to put childhood lead exposure back on the national agenda after interest waned following bans on lead in gasoline and paint in the 1970s. Besides being part of the driving force behind Title X, the alliance educates the public on the dangers of lead to children, publishes reports and policy analyses, convenes international workshops, and helps to secure funding for lead poisoning research from public and private sources. Information on the group's work, including an in-depth explanation of Title X and other recent government actions, is available on the alliance's Web site, located at <http://www.aedp.org>.

For the most part, Title X deals with the problem of lead-based paint in publicly subsidized housing. Since this housing is often old and poorly maintained, it is likely to contain deteriorating lead-based paint. According to the alliance, children from poor families are eight times as likely to have high blood lead levels as children from wealthier families. Correcting this disparity was a major objective of Title X.

The act also established certification and licensing programs for contractors who remove lead-based paint and for laboratories that analyze paint for lead content. It established a grant program, administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and a federal hotline for disseminating information on lead poisoning (1-800-LEAD-FYI). Title X's major effect on private housing is the requirement that property owners provide information on lead to people who will inhabit older homes.

More information on Title X, including a section-by-section analysis, is available on the alliance's Web site under the Lead Poisoning Policy link on the home page. Also available is information on pending Environmental Protection Agency standards for lead-contaminated soil and dust, CDC recommendations for screening children for lead poisoning, and information on state and private screening programs.

Eventually, the alliance would like to see more legislation aimed at reducing exposure to lead in private homes, and improved screening of children for lead poisoning by both the federal government and private health care providers. (Despite the Health Care Finance Administration's requirement that all children covered by Medicaid be screened for lead poisoning, it is estimated that 81% are not.) Information about what the alliance is doing to effect these changes is accessible through the Projects and Activities link on the homepage. Also located under this link is a description of the alliance's efforts to foster cooperation among groups with similar interests, including an extensive database of advocacy and community groups that are working with the alliance. There is also information here about the alliance's work to reduce childhood lead poisoning outside the United States, particularly in countries where leaded gasoline is still in use.

These international efforts are described in more detail under the What's New link on the home page. There is a description available here of a February 1999 workshop held by the alliance in Bangkok that focused on reducing lead usage in Asia, and of a similar workshop held in May 1999 in Havana that focused on the Caribbean region. Also under the What's New link is the latest information about grants being made available by HUD and other federal agencies to study ways of reducing the lead hazard in homes. Over \$350 million in federal grant money has been distributed since 1992 for controlling lead hazards in low-income housing, and in 1996, Congress voted to continue this funding at the rate of \$60 million per year. Updates on recent congressional actions are also available in this section of the Web site.

Brief articles on all of the latest developments related to childhood lead poisoning are provided by the alliance in its *Alliance Alert* newsletter, available via the What's New link. Besides giving updates on research funding, government actions, and the alliance's international activities, the newsletter summarizes recent relevant research, such as a study published in the March 1999 issue of *Pediatrics* that showed that education and specialized cleaning may result in a 17% decrease in blood lead levels in children.

Another announcement recently made in the *Alliance Alert* is that the alliance's sister organization, the National Center for Lead-Safe Housing, recently established its own Web site, located at <http://www.lead-safehousing.org>. The center was established in 1992 with a grant from the Fannie Mae Foundation that was given at the request of the alliance. The \$5.5 million grant, the largest ever given by that organization, helps the center develop, evaluate, and promote cost-effective strategies to reduce childhood lead poisoning. The center assesses the strategies that HUD and local governments are employing to reduce lead exposure, and provides technical assistance and training to health and housing departments, nonprofit organizations, insurance companies, and real estate developers.

Information on the center's recent studies and analyses is available through the Scientific Research link on the home page. Other resources on the center's Web site include information on maintaining a lead-safe home and information on lead safety for painters, contractors, developers, and others who might encounter lead-based paint in their work.



Leaders in Lead

